

## VARIANCES TO STANDARDS APPLICATION PROCESS (ARM 10.55.604)

Last September, the Board of Public Education (BPE) adopted revised rules that allow accredited schools to apply for variances designed to meet or exceed results under established standards. The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) Accreditation and Educator Preparation Division staff developed an application for districts interested in seeking a “variances to standards.” (Click here for the fill-in application: [http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/Accred/13VTS\\_Application.docx](http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/Accred/13VTS_Application.docx))

The deadline for “variances to standards” applications – first round only – is extended from July 1 to Wednesday, July 17, 2013. Implementation of approved applications is second semester 2013-14. Extension of the deadline to July 17 will allow local superintendents time to plan and develop the “variances to standards” application with public participation, and to prepare for the June and July meetings of the local boards of trustees. The “variances to standards” rule requires local boards of trustees to produce evidence of local public participation, and evidence that it officially approved the “variance to standards” application, before submission to the newly formed Variances to Standards Review Board.

A possible scenario for developing an application might look like this:

- Step 1 – The local superintendent works with staff and community members to develop the concept and complete a draft application;
- Step 2 – The local board of trustees approves the concept and draft application at the June meeting;
- Step 3 – The superintendent continues to refine the application with input from staff and community stakeholders, documenting the process;
- Step 4 – During the July board of trustees meeting, the superintendent presents the proposed “variance to standards” application, with accompanying documentation of the process, and list of contributing stakeholders;
- Step 5 – In July, the local board takes final action on the application.
- Step 6 – The school district must provide evidence it adopted the application for variance at an official, properly noticed meeting of the board of trustees. Including the minutes of the local board in the application, showing their oversight, decision-making, and approval, the school district fulfills its requirement to “provide evidence through official minutes of the board of trustees that local school and community stakeholders were involved in the consideration and development of the proposed variance to standards.”
- Step 6 – By July 17, 2013, the local board of trustees approved “variance to standards” application is submitted to the OPI.

In August, the Variance to Standards Review Board will consider all applications submitted by Montana accredited schools and make recommendations for approval, modification, or disapproval to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.



In September, the BPE will consider the recommendations of State Superintendent Juneau and take final action.

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